

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47), Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam and Chair of the House Armed Services subcommittee with primary jurisdiction over the nation's cybersecurity, today condemned Vietnam for using malware to illicitly monitor the internet activity of human rights and democracy activists. The cyberattacks were first reported by internet service provider Google, which recently shut down its search operations in China after the government attempted to hack into the e-mail accounts of local dissidents.

"I am outraged by new reports that Vietnam's government has been using the internet as a weapon against its own people," said Rep. Sanchez. "Time and time again, President Nguyen Minh Triet has proven he will stop at nothing to silence critics of his regime and shut down the free flow of information and communication in Vietnam. He and his government have taken steps to block access to a number of websites, including Facebook and other popular internet forums, in the form of denial-of-service attacks. This is unacceptable conduct from a country that wants to be an international political player, especially one that has promised to adhere to basic human rights standards and the rule of law.

"It's time for the U.S. and international communities, and any internet service providers that are concerned by these attacks, to say 'enough is enough!' Yesterday, I applied for a visa to visit Vietnam in the hopes that I will be able to meet with human rights activists to get their side of the story. Press reports can only tell us so much, which is why it's important for our leaders to assess the extent of Vietnam's abuses for themselves. If my application is approved, I also intend to meet with Vietnam's Ministry of Information and Communications to discuss the importance of free speech and personally condemn these recent cyberattacks."

The need for action in Vietnam has never been greater. In addition to infiltrating the private internet accounts of local dissidents, the government has continued to crack down on religious freedoms, most recently by authorizing the desecration of a crucifix in Vietnam's historic Dong Chiem parish cemetery. For these and other abuses, Rep. Sanchez has urged the State Department to re-designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and reassess its trade relations until President Triet takes concrete action to improve its human rights record.

#